DESK BASED ASSESSMENT ADVICE NOTE
Durham County Council Archaeology Section (DCCAS)

When Should I do a Desk Based Assessment (DBA)?

You should only produce a DBA for a planning application if specifically asked for by DCCAS or the relevant planning case officer. Due to the development of online resources and other desktop data management technologies, we usually have access to sufficient information to assess an application without further research.

Therefore, unless a DBA is adding information to the decision-making process, the work is unnecessary as part of the planning process.

Your client may still want a DBA for their own purposes, but if one is submitted with an application without having been requested or discussed with DCCAS, we reserve the right to charge for the time taken to read and assess the information in the DBA. Details of this are in our charging policy (available via http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2012/Historic-Environment-Record)

If in doubt, please contact DCCAS who will be able to advise you on specific planning applications.

Information available to DCCAS staff

DCCAS have access to various data sets which allow us to make informed decisions on the archaeological requirements of most schemes. A list of these sources is provided below. Where known, the online location for this data is listed, but not all the information is online, and some has been obtained by us through other routes.

Historic Environment Record (HER)- Event and Heritage Feature Records
Historic Landscape Characterisation http://www.durham.gov.uk/hlc
Former National Monuments record data – accessible via the Heritage Gateway
at http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/
Excavation Index - accessible via Heritage Gateway
http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/
Local tithe Maps - available from the Durham University Library Special Collections
http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ead/ddr/ddradmin.xml#DDR-EA-TTH-1-t
Portable Antiquities Scheme - data available from http://finds.org.uk/database
LIDAR (LIght Detection And Ranging)**-** One metre resolution data available from
https://environment.data.gov.uk/
Designated sites - data available to download from
https://services.historicengland.org.uk/NMRDataDownload/default.aspx or
accessible via the NHLE https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/
National Mapping Program - data comprising the North East Rapid Costal Zone
Assessment, the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty miner
Farmer Project, and the Archaeological assessment of the aggregate
producing areas of County Durham Project – available via

https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/aerial-archaeology-mapping-explorer/

Ordnance Survey Historic Mapping – from First Edition to 2000s as raster files, including 1:500 Town Plans some available via https://maps.nls.uk/

Vertical Aerial Photographs – 1940s verticals and more modern coverage – some available via Google Earth

National Trust - Monument data via Web Mapping – also available via the Heritage Gateway at http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/

Various DCCAS acquired layers – such as the North East Vernacular Architecture Group recording projects data, Milestone Society data, etc

Additional Collections to check if doing a DBA

Once you have checked if a DBA is needed for the planning process (i.e. asked for by DCCAS, Durham County Council (DCC), or Darlington Borough Council (DBC)) one of your first action is to request a full HER search – this can only be obtained direct from the HER.

USING KEYS TO THE PAST OR THE HERITAGE GATEWAY AS A SOURCE OF DURHAM AREA HER DATA IS NOT SUFFICIENT, AS NOT ALL HER RECORDS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THOSE SOURCES.

The HER search will attempt to highlight which of the online sources may have information not included in the search. However, this is only as good as the data we have (which is only occasionally updated) so you should also check the online sources yourself for information.

IF DCCAS FIND THAT THERE ARE RECORDS WHICH ARE AVAILABLE FROM KNOWN SOURCES WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN INCLUDED IN THE DBA, IT WILL BE REJECTED AS INCOMPLETE.

Once you have checked all the above sources, you should then investigate relevant ones from the lists below.

General Collections
Historic England Archive https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/archive-services/
England's Places http://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/archive-collections/englands-places/
Beamish archives
Archaeological records held by the Universities of Durham and Newcastle (if applicable)
Local/national historical and archaeological journals and publications referred to on the HER
The North East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment https://researchframeworks.org/nerf/
Google Earth – for historic Aerial Photographs

Geotechnical information Collections
Where available and relevant, any geotechnical information should be checked, and the information incorporated into the DBA.

Borehole logs (from client if available)
British Geological Survey data https://www.bgs.ac.uk/

County Durham Specific Collections
Durham County Record Office
> http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/8338/Home and also
> www.durham.gov.uk/durhamrecord

County Durham Local History Reference Library (Clayport Library, Durham City)
Durham University Special Collections and Archives (Palace Green, Durham City)
Durham Cathedral Records and Archives

Darlington Specific Collections
Durham County Record Office is the official archive
http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/8338/Home
Crown Street Local Studies Library

Specialist Collections
The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers
> https://mininginstitute.org.uk/

Weardale Museum https://weardalemuseum.org.uk/
Dukesfield Documents – A research archive centred on the Blackett and Beaumont
> lead business records www.dukesfield.org.uk/research/dukesfield-documents

National Railway Museum Archive - http://www.nrm.org.uk/ResearchAndArchive

It is worth noting that some estate or company records may have gone to archives outside County Durham such as in Northumberland or Tyne & Wear.

Parameters of the DBA

The DBA should be carried out in accordance with Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Guidance for DBAs (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2014 *Standard and guidance for historic environment desk-based assessment* for more general information about writing a desk-based assessment. https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&GDBA_2.pdf

The DBA should attempt to make a model of the site in the past based on all the information available, ie geology, topography, HER information and others' sources. This model should try and suggest possible former land uses, their significance, and their possible survival. When determining the potential for different land use, the reason for the level of potential should be explicated. It is not enough to state, "The potential for Roman Archaeology for this site is low." The arguments as to why this is the case should be included in the DBA. The DBA should include a Statement of Significance for the site or building, including the relative significance of constituent features.

The DBA should also include an Impact Assessment. The site model should be assessed against the projected impacts of the proposed development. This should not only include the primary impacts (eg ground works, foundations, landscaping, services, drainage etc) but also other impacts related to the development (eg access

roads, compounds, lay down areas, etc). This should highlight where work affects areas of high or low significance and where this may represent unacceptable levels of harm or where that harm may be acceptable, if mitigated through archaeological works. A statement saying the site has significance and work will have an impact is not enough.

There should be a critical analysis of sources used and their relevance to the particular site. Listing all the sources and their information is not necessarily useful if they do not provide new information about the site, however it is worth making a note of sources that have been checked but provided no additional information.

The search for the DBA should be a minimum of 1 KM area from the site boundary in rural areas. Smaller search areas may be more appropriate in urban areas.

In order to keep the document to a manageable size, the full legal and Policy framework for the work does not need to be repeated. Only reference to particular aspects relevant to a particular site need be included.

Desk-Based Research for Geophysical Surveys

In some advice given to developers, DCCAS will say that a geophysical survey of a site is required but a stand-alone desk-based assessment is not. However adequate research should be carried out to set the results in context. The aim of desk-based research is to aid interpretations of the results of the survey and will require a full HER search and may incorporate similar research to a stand-alone DBA, particularly looking at LIDAR and historic mapping.

A full map regression is not necessary however should historic maps help to identify geophysical anomalies then their inclusion would be useful, for example when identifying historic field boundaries or previous uses of a site.

If there is any doubt, please contact DCCAS.

DCCAS
Version 3
23/03/2022